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ABSTRACT

Until recently, the educational system has resisted orientation toward change and has represented traditionally enculturated values and cultural stability. Current perspectives, however, indicate that formal schooling is a prominent factor in societal modernization and individual modernity. Exemplifying this aspect of education is the experience of American Samoa with western education. Western education was, in cultural terms, a radical element within Samoan society. Its initial development had little influence in changing Samoan culture, but a complete restructuring, rebuilding and partial restaffing of a cooperative education effort from 1964-72 had a major impact on the community at large. By the early 1970's, many of the basic tenets of traditional Samoan culture were being seriously challenged. In this situation, education seems to have been an acculturative agent rather than one of cultural stability. There is also some evidence to support the assumption that cooperative education has had an impact on the individual student as well. (Author/EB)

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EDUCATIONAL POLICY AND CULTURAL CHANGE IN AMERICAN SAMOA[1]

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ABSTRACT

Traditionally anthropology has emphasized the process of cultural change, while education has stressed cultural continuality in the tramsmission of cultural heritage from one generation to another. The rise of modernism in recent years, has suggested a different role for education, that of an agent of cultural change. These approaches to the role of education in cultural change are examined in the American Samoan context for three distinct periods of educational development in the territory.

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EDUCATIONAL POLICY AND CULTURAL CHANGE
IN AMERICAN SAMOA

Introduction

The study of cultural change has in recent years been a major focus of research in a variety of disciplinary areas. Economists have studied economic growth; political scientists have examined the development of the nation-state; anthropologists have looked at the process of acculturation and community development; psychologists have examined personal characteristics which relate to psychic adjustment; and sociologists have examined the role of institutions and the place of the individual in the process of modernization (Inkeles, 1977:136-7). Educators, who have always borrowed freely from their parent disciplines in matters of theory and methodology, have thus found themselves faced with a wide and varied set of choices when it has come to trying to understand the role of education in cultural change.

Acculturation

One perspective on cultural change which has emerged from the anthropological tradition views both education and anthropology as being

> concerned with the transmission of cultural heritage from one generation to another - and with the means by which that transmission is accomplished. Although anthropology has tended to be preoccupied with the process of cultural *change*, and the conditions under which it takes place, rather than with continuality, it would seem, as Herskovits has said, that cultural change can be best understood when considered in relation to cultural stability (1950:20). (Eggan, 1956: 347)

In this view, education provides the backdrop of cultural continuality against which anthropologists study the process of cultural change. Nor is this a minority point of view. Kneller, in an introductory educational anthropology text, cites Ruth Benedict (1957), W. Lloyd Warner (1944), and A.F.C. Wallace (1961) to support the position that "(m)ost anthropologists maintain that education can not direct social change, because it is already interwoven with more powerful social and cultural forces (1965: 91).

Even where the governmental educational policy is oriented toward change, the educational system may resist this leadership and continue to represent traditionally enculturated values and thus cultural stability. For example, Higgins (1976) indicates that despite Iranian governmental efforts to use the educational system as an instrument of social and cultural change, there remains a lack of congruence between official educational goals, which are often acculturative, and the institutional transmission of culture, which remains traditional and enculturative.

In another study, which examined educational policy in post war Japan, Armstrong found that the "massive attempt by American occupational authorities to transform Japanese society by imposing an American educational model on that country" (1976: 278) was a failure, because while

> fundamental commitments may appear to bend under certain conditions, a closer examination reveals that any "give" represents only a temporary straining away in response to overwhelming external forces. With the removal of these external levers, these commitments spring back to their original, traditional conditions. (p.283)

Thus, it would seem that there is considerable evidence for viewing education as a stabilizing force within society, and despite current protestations to the contrary from education's critics, a major factor in cultural continuality. No doubt, many people would still agree with Ruth Benedict's statement that:

> Our problems in transmission of culture arise from the rapidity of social changes in our society; and no method of education can prevent this. ...Those critics who blame education for the changes they resent in our culture are making the educational system a scapegoat for vast changes in the structure of modern society which they do not take into account (1957: 213).

Individual Modernity

Another perspective on the role of education in cultural change is one which has developed in sociological and developmental circles over the last ten years. These studies, of which *Becoming Modern* (Inkeles and Smith, 1974) provides the most systematic exploration of the issues, have concerned themselves "with the place of the *individual* in the process of modernization (Inkeles, 1977: 157)." Modernism is seen as a mode of individual functioning which includes an openness to new experiences, respect for science and technology, and a positive orientation to planning ahead. This mode of behaviour is learned through work in factories, in modern bureaucratic organizations, in agricultural cooperatives, and especially through formal schooling (Inkeles, 1977: 157).

From this perspective, formal schooling is a prominent factor in societal modernization and individual modernity. A review of the literature[2] on modernity and education by

Holsinger and Theisen has found evidence to support four hypotheses which link schooling with increased modernity. The hypotheses which they put forward include:

A. The longer children have been exposed to formal schooling, the higher are their modernity scores.

B. The modernity scores of elementary school children are higher than those of comparable age and SES non-school children.

C. The more modern the structural arrangements of the child's schooling environment are judged to be, the higher are his modernity scores.

D. The positive association between schooling and individual modernity can not be explained or interpreted by any of the alternative modernizing forces in the design such as age, sex, nonverbal intelligence, SES background, media exposure, school achievement, urban residence, parents' modernity or teacher's modernity (1977: 324-4).

Thus, it would seem from the modernist point of view, that in many situations, additional years of school attendance will bring about increased individual modernity, and that, if this pattern of increased schooling is widespread, social and cultural change will result.

The proceeding paragraphs have perhaps oversimplified both perspectives on the role of education in cultural change, a problem made more difficult by a large literature in both areas. However, while not minimizing the differences in perspectives which do exist, they are, I believe, primarily differences in foci rather than conflicting sets of "facts". Both perspectives can be useful for the educator who to be effective in a time of change must understand and relate to plural cultures in society, the culture of the school, and to the individual student.

In the sections which follow I would like to illustrate these perspectives on cultural change with reference to educational policy in American Samoa.

American Samoan Setting

Much has been written about American Samoa[3]. These five small tropical, mountainous South Pacific islands now support about 30,000 people in 76 mainly coastal villages. Even today about 96 percent of land there is owned communally and occupancy and use are regulated by Samoan custom.

In contrast with other societies in Polynesia, relative cultural stability has characterized Samoa since its first contact with Europeans. This phenomena seems to have occurred because, as in the case of Christianity, Samoans took a number of practices from Europe, "and fitted them inside Samoan custom making them part of the native culture" (Keesing, 1934: 410).

The American colonial administration also aided in maintaining cultural stability throughout the first half of the 20th century with a policy of non-interference in Samoan customs which did not conflict with American Law (Gray, 1960: 126) and through the general neglect of the territory.

Traditional enculturation in American Samoa follows a pattern common to many Pacific Islands. A heavy emphasis is placed on group participation, cooperation and social conformity. Individuality and precocity are severely punished, and the child learns to view behaviour in terms of the social pattern. As Samoan culture provides no

formal teaching roles, adolescents seek out their own learning opportunities and acquire skills through involvement in everyday situations. They develop at their own pace, with proper regard for precocity, and as they grow older almost imperceptibly become adults (Sanchez, 1955).

Even the mission or pastor's schools first established in the 1830's, which originally were based on the assumption that change was desirable (Sanchez, 1955: 120), were gradually Samoanized. In fact, these schools came in time to serve an important function in Samoan culture, that of maintaining the accepted Samoan-Christian traditions (Sanchez, 1955: 121).

Early Western Education[4]

Between 1921 when the public school system first began, and 1964 when "cooperative education" through educational television was introduced, the public school system was characterized by an increasing number of small village schools staffed by poorly paid, locally trained, Samoan teachers. Although policy varied during this period, the teaching of English to Samoans was a central theme. The lack of funds, and the continual turnover of American supervisory personnel made it difficult to implement any effective, long-term policy.[5]

However, unlike the western influences mentioned previously, western education was, in cultural terms, a radical element within Samoan society. Its values of competition, precocity and enforced learning by age group contrasted sharply with the enculturated societal values. In addition, western schools were staffed mainly by young

men or women, who taught children, none of whom had recognized traditional skills nor held important positions in Samoan society. Finally, Western education was the one agency which was "absolutely out of control of the village chiefs" (Sanchez, 1955: 118).

It should not be surprising then that efforts at education in American Samoa were, during this period, generally ineffective, and Samoans and outside critics[6] alike held the system in low repute. Samoan leaders seem to have tolerated the western educational system because American authorities required it, but rather than being absorbed into the Samoan cultural system the educational system seems to have been compartmentalized[7] and thereby excluded from the mainstream of Samoan culture.

During this extensive period, western education was a major potential force for acculturation within Samoan society. Yet, it was generally ineffective in bringing about cultural change because the system lacked a forceful and consistent educational policy. There also seemed to be a general lack of sensitiveness to and involvement with the major forces operating in Samoan culture, or in the terms of this paper, a lack of an anthropological perspective by educators.

However, as Keesing notes, this period was not without its impact on Samoan culture. As early as the 1930's, "a set of influences that may be broadly called educational... commenced to spread out from the urban centers, by way of the schools, and through the part Samoan population" (1934; 476). Perhaps, here we see the first educationally related evidence of modernism at work in Samoan culture.

Cooperative Education[8]

The period of cooperative education in American Samoa lasted nine years from 1964 until 1972. During this period Governor Rex Lee and Vernon Bronson of the National Association of Educational Broadcasters created a highly structured, and centralized, team teaching approach to curriculum development and classroom learning designed to educate both students and the Samoan classroom teachers (Hall, 1969). Cooperative education used the best American teachers available to broadcast, using a six channel instructional television system, linguistically controlled lessons in all subject areas to 24 newly constructed schools. In the schools, the Samoan teachers, supervised by American principals and experienced instructional supervisors, reinforced the presentation of the televised lessons as necessary (Bronson, 1968).

The complete restructuring, rebuilding and partial restaffing of the educational system had a major impact on the community at large as well. The influx of money created jobs and began to alter the economic structure of the community. Electricity became available for the first time in most villages, and night time television became an attractive diversion. Roads were built linking many of the villages to the administrative centre. Finally, there was an influx of American personnel, some of whom lived in the villages and provided alternative lifestyle models.

However, when this period is examined closely, it becomes apparent that what has changed is not the general educational policy which still stressed English language

instruction, nor the degree of sensitivity to community needs and inputs which were basically ignored, but the degree of determination backed by financial resources, with which the new educational policy was pursued and implemented. That educational policy changed little during this period is emphasized by the fact that Beauchamp (1975) in his paper on educational policy in American Samoa does not even mention the introduction or use of instructional television.

Cooperative education did however make a significant impact on culture in American Samoa. As Holmes, an anthropologist who has studied American Samoa for twenty years, has pointed out, by the early 1970's education, economic development, emigration, and changes in the *matai* (chief) system were seriously challenging many of the basic tenets of traditional Samoan culture (1974: 98-107). Education was thus undoubtedly the catylist for general cultural change during this period. In this situation, education seems to have been an acculturative agent rather than one of cultural stability.

There is also some tentative evidence to support the assumption that cooperative education had an impact on the individual student. A correlational study of the class of 1973 Samoan high school graduates, which examined acculturation and educational achievement, found students held four identifiable approaches to acculturation. These included a school-media approach which appeared to reflect the unique television system of instruction of cooperative education present in American Samoa. Students reflecting this

orientation lived in families who owned television sets, had attended cooperative education (TV) schools and scored relatively poorly on a test of Samoan culture. In the area of values, they emphasized quiet receptivity, self sufficiency, competition while rejecting the carefree life (Baldauf, 1977:252).

It is also interesting to note that the most important of the four approaches found in this study was identified as the modern man approach, with high loadings on academic achievement, western type behaviour, and the values of independence, change, success and competition (Baldauf, 1977: 251). These results lend support to the hypothesis that schooling promotes individual modernity, but suggest that it is not a uniform process.

Samoan Education

Since 1970 the Department of Education has moved to reduce their dependence on short term contract Americans and instead to fill top administrative positions with qualified Samoans. The emphasis on centralized television instruction has also been greatly reduced to the point where cooperative education can no longer be said to exist.[9] In its place is developing, based on a thoroughgoing needs assessment (Thomas, 1977), a curriculum based more nearly on Samoan needs with a growing emphasis on bilingual-bicultural approaches to education (Thomas, 1974).

While it is still too early to evaluate the success of the current educational programmes, it is interesting to note that education in American Samoa is now attempting to

fill a more traditional role, that of providing cultural stability for the new Samoan culture. While there is a growing emphasis on traditional Samoan culture in the curriculum, the programmes continue to strive for academic excellence in the more recently adopted western sense.

Summary and Conclusions

This paper has explored some of the issues related to the perspective educators should take towards the role of education in cultural change. Using the example of education in American Samoa, it has been shown that while generalizations about anthropological and sociological models of cultural change may not always fit the data, these approaches may nonetheless be helpful to the educator who wishes to understand the role of education in cultural change.

ENDNOTES

1. Paper presented to the 1978 Conference of the Australian Anthropological Society, Sydney, August 1978.

2. Also see Armer and Youtz (1971), Peshkin (1970) and several studies included in the book *Education and Individual Modernity in Developing Countries* (Inkeles and Holsinger 1974).

3. Among the better known studies are those by Margaret Mead (1952; 1968) but Holmes (1957), Grattan (1948), Keesing (1934) and Keesing and Keesing (1956) also provide important insights.

4. See Sanchez (1955) for more complete details.

5. Beauchamp (1975) argues that American colonial policy in Samoa has been ambiguous and that decisive forward looking (i.e. acculturative) educational policy should be implemented.

6. The state of neglect was so great there were few early critics. Hall's (1961) *Readers Digest* article is generally credited in the literature with exposing the poor conditions and initiating change.

7. For other examples of compartmentalization see Bigart (1971) and Trivedi (1975).

8. Schramm (1973) provides the best currently available summary of ITV in American Samoa.

9. Cooney commenting on the cutback of television believes "it is we who have failed, not television ..." (1973: 26).

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